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Soviet Reported Building A Vast Antimissile System

Net Believed Nationwide

By WILLIAM M. BEECHER

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 7—As President Johnson ponders whether to deploy a costly Nike-X missile defense around the United States, the American intelligence community is poring over every scrap of information it can gather on what, precisely, the Russians are doing in this field.

Despite reams of data from such intelligence sources as reconnaissance satellites, the experts do not know precisely what the Soviet Union is doing.

But qualified sources say this is the current reading:

¶Antimissile missile facilities are being constructed all over Russia, not just around Moscow and Leningrad. They are being positioned athwart natural access avenues that American land-based and sea-based missiles must traverse to attack key military and industrial targets.

¶The defense is believed built around a long-range, solid fuel missile whose capabilities may match or even exceed that of the Nike Zeus missile, currently under advanced development. Such a missile would attempt to achieve interception in space hundreds of miles from the defended areas.

The first elements of this so-called area defense are expected to become operational within the next 12 months. At that point, Russia will have a limited capability to destroy incoming missiles. The United States has no such defense, except on paper and in prototype equipment.

Some Unknowns

But the analysts readily admit they do not know how effective the over-all Soviet defense may be or whether it includes other types of missiles or when the full system may be functioning.

The appraisal by these analysts of the Soviet missile defense will do more than simply play a central role in the United States decision on Nike-X. If the President decides against a go-ahead, the analysts' appraisal also will figure prominently in the Congressional debate that will inevitably follow.

The Nike-X question is said to have occupied a large portion of yesterday's defense budget meeting at the LBJ Ranch in Texas.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff are on record as unanimously favoring immediate deployment of the Nike. Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara, however, is believed to remain unconvinced that a start must be made just yet, prefering instead to devote additional funds to improving the capability of America's strategic missiles so that they can penetrate the Russian defenses and thus perhaps deter the Soviets from ever launching an attack.

American specialists say there is a vast amount of new activity at many of the thousands of Soviet antiaircraft missile sites and at many new sites as well.

The activity started in northwest Russia, along an arc guarding the principal path that the Minuteman and Titan II missiles fired from the United States would travel in an attack on principal targets in Russia. The activity then spread to other areas, including those that Polaris missiles would cross if fired from submarines in the Atlantic Ocean or the Mediterranean Sea.

Dual Capability

Because the early work was concentrated at antiaircraft sites, there was some speculation in the intelligence community that the effort might have merely been designed to improve defenses against strategic bombers.

The consensus now is that the equipment going in doubtless will have dual capability, against missiles and bombers. But it is thought likely that [illegible]

stressed since missiles present the greater threat.

The Russians have paraded in Moscow two different weapons that they call antimissile missiles. These weapons are generally referred to in the West by their NATO code names, Griffon and Galosh.

Of the two, American specialists believe the larger one, the Galosh, probably is the key element of the system now being deployed. The solid fuel Galosh has been tested, they say, but there is scant information on its thrust, payload potential or range.

"It's certainly large enough so that it could be every bit as good as our Zeus is or ever will be," according to one source.

The Nike-X system supplements the Zeus, which has a range of about 400 miles, with a shorter range, high acceleration sprint missile that is designed to intercept those missiles that get past Zeus.

The analysts do not know whether the Griffon constitutes the second missile in a similar one-two Russian punch.

"Of course, the Galosh itself may well have a short range intercept capability as well," says another analyst. "How good depends on its acceleration."

Is the Soviet missile defense better than the Nike-X?

Some United States experts doubt it.

"Although the Russians have always been very defense-minded and have devoted a lot of resources to defense," says one Pentagon official, "we've spent more than $2-billion on development of Nike-X and we're confident we know at least as much as they in this field. We can't be sure, of course, but this is our best judgment."

How System Would Work

The Nike-X system is designed to work this way:

Long-range radars pick up enemy missiles shortly after launching, and their flight paths are carefully computed [illegible] they come within about [illegible] miles of the United States. [illegible] Zeus missiles are fired on an intercept course.

Because large numbers of enemy missiles might be fired, some containing devices designed to elude Zeus, super-fast sprint missiles would be sent up to engage those missiles that slipped through the outer defense to within 50 miles or less of their target.

Both the Zeus and sprint missiles would be launched from concrete and steel silos, somewhat like Minuteman missiles.

A whole range of deployments is possible, depending on the degree of protection desired and the cost to be shouldered.

In a price range of from $3-billion to $8-billion, the system would feature large numbers of Zeus missiles positioned all around the continental United States with only a relatively small number of sprint missiles defending key cities and possibly military systems such as the headquarters for the Strategic Air Command in Omaha, Neb.

Officials say such a light defense would provide excellent protection against any small attack, whether mounted by the Red Chinese some years hence or by the Russians in an accidental or unauthorized launch.

Such a defense could be fully constructed in six years or less, technical specialists say. Also, it could be expanded at any time, by the addition of more radars and missiles, to provide a much tighter shield keyed to handling an all-out Soviet missile strike.

A tight defense might cost anywhere from $20-billion to $30-billion. Even proponents admit it could not guarantee that some Soviet missiles would not get through, but it should intercept a good many and thus limit death and damage in the event of all-out war.

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Space Shots Stir Concern

By EVERT CLARK

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 7—Confusion and concern over the Soviet Union's space plans have been increased here by three recent launchings in which unusual secrecy played a part.

In two of these, the space craft exploded in orbit—apparently accidentally, although this was not certain. The third Soviet launching, last week, had some earmarks of a test flight for a manned launching. But it also was surrounded by confusing circumstances that analysts here are still trying to understand.

One reason for concern among the experts here is a feeling that the United States is entering another period in which it may be underestimating the Soviet Union's commitment to space exploration. This, the experts say, occurs periodically, particularly when there is a long gap between Russian manned flights.

It has now been 20 months since the last Soviet astronauts were sent aloft in the two-man flight by Voskhod 2 on March 18, 1964. The Russians have apparently not practiced rendezvous and docking — at least with manned vehicles—as the United States has in the Gemini program.

These two facts have been taken by some as an indication that the Soviet Union intends to skip manned lunar exploration and concentrate on manned, earth-orbiting space stations and later manned flights to Mars and Venus.

U.S. Lag Recalled

But the experts here recall that there was a 22-month lag between the end of America's Mercury program and the first manned Gemini flight.

While they discount that time gap as an indication of Soviet plans, they are harder put to explain why Russia does not appear to have tackled the rendezvous problem, which is considered essential to American plans for lunar flights.

Observers here have long expected a manned Russian flight. Comments made privately by Soviet scientists to Americans at an international space meeting in Madrid in October indicated that such a flight would come soon—possibly in late January or early February.

The Soviet scientists even jokingly told their American counterparts not to worry about possible budget cuts for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration because "We will help you out with that shortly after the first of the year."

This flight, if the Soviet hints mean anything, would involve three to six men. The experts here have thought for more than a year that the next Russian flight would involve a number of astronauts.

What United States observers are in the greatest doubt about now is the possible relationship between the three recent Soviet shots and the manned shot that has been awaited for so long.

The first of these three launchings was made last Sept. 17. It was a large vehicle, but not nearly so large as the three 13-ton Proton vehicles that had been put into orbit as probable forerunners of a multiman "space bus."

New Moves Observed

It was the first vehicle of such a large size to be launched from Tyuratam, a site in central Kazakhstan usually used for launching smaller Cosmos satellites. It was also the first time that a satellite had been launched from this base at an inclination of 49 degrees to the Equator—an angle that provides maximum coverage for reconnaissance of the United States.

Russia did not even report the launching of the vehicle, much less its mission, size and whether any part of its was recovered. Soon after launching the vehicle was observed to break into at least 80 pieces, many of which are still in orbit.

Confusion over the spacecraft's mission caused the United States Government not to list it immediately in its public catalog of space objects, the Satellite Situation Report.

On Nov. 2, most of these circumstances were repeated. A large vehicle, launched from Tyuratam at a 49 degree angle, soon broke into at least 40 pieces. Russia did not acknowledge the launching and it was entered in the American catalog only after delay.

The third unusual launching came on Nov. 28. This time Russia announced the shot, naming the craft Cosmos 133, but it did not disclose the angle of inclination, which is usually given for a Cosmos satellite.

It was the first spacecraft in some months to fly at the altitudes used for most Russian manned flights. If Cosmos 133 is the first test of some new vehicle intended to carry men—something to rendezvous with a Proton craft, perhaps—more unmanned flights will probably precede a manned mission.

Five test vehicles preceded the first Vostok manned capsules. Only one test flight each preceded the two Voskhod flights, apparently because Voskhod was a simple adaptation of the already-proved Vostok.

The September and November launchings may be tests preceding new shots to Mars, since an opportunity to launch to that planet occurs in the next few weeks. Also they may have some military significance that has not yet been recognized, the analysts here say.